
Prologue

Of Madness, War, and Untold Riches

In the beginning, the information sector was an idea. Not just any idea, a big idea. An idea so intoxicating that it drove a populace to the brink of madness. An idea so seductive that those caught in its grasp bet their savings, their homes, their careers, their futures, on its veracity. An idea so compelling that it riveted the attention of CEOs, captains of finance, and government leaders, along with the usual array of academics, analysts, and journalists. An idea so universal that it unified the cultures of Main Street and Wall Street. An idea so profound that it redefined popular culture, late night humor, fashion, design, taste, and style. Alas, it was also an idea so flawed that it died as spectacularly as it had lived, only to become mocked and scorned by its erstwhile adoring public. This exciting and creative idea that was once trumpeted from the rooftops was suddenly whispered only in hushed tones behind closed doors.

The fog of war obscured our early encounters with this idea. The crown engaged a leading citizen in mortal combat. Each claimed to represent the common weal. They pitched their battle in full view of the press, whose daily accounts fueled public debate. Was the crown out to expose this citizen's villainy, punish its transgressions, prevent their continuation, and deter their emulation? Or was it out to squelch the power and popularity amassed by a benevolent, hard working, ingenious, successful individual? The debate continues to this day.

But with the waning of public interest, the debate over ideas, riches, wars, and recovery returned to the primordial temples where the information sector dwelt during its pre-commercial evolution. There great,

mysterious, priestly orders labor to comprehend the sector's past, diagnose its ills, divine the elixirs needed for its recovery, and restore it to a vigorous future. For these priests always understood what others may have forgotten. They knew that even in its debased state, the information sector remains very much alive, and that beneath its charred shell of an idea, more than a mere ember of truth continued to glow.

They saw those who labor in the sector's salt mines pioneer new ways to develop products. They saw those new ways threaten to upset the status quo, long beloved by entrenched interests. They saw those interests fight back to preserve their privilege and their profits. And they saw the confusion wrought among the public, now consumers, now investors, striving both to ignore the information sector and to comprehend the ways that it will alter their lives. And so these priests of the information sector continued to bide their time, increase their understanding, refine their ideas, and await the day when the information sector would rise again, like a phoenix, to soar back into public imagination and esteem.

This, then, is the all-too-familiar story of the information sector: raised in cloistered seclusion, schooled by priests, debuted as a superstar, beloved in its adolescence, scarred by war, exposed as fallible, abandoned by its courtiers, exiled from its place of glory, betrayed, despised, beaten, sullied, and finally forced to slink home to seek the ministrations of its creators while awaiting its ultimate and inevitable resurrection.

And then, slowly, with our attention focused elsewhere, the information sector began to stir, to emerge from its somnolence, and to test the waters gingerly while contemplating its return. And we began, once again, to take notice . . .